

*EPW Review of Labour**December 28, 2002*

## **Child Labour in India**

### **Disentangling Essence and Solutions**

*In the drive for universal education all children not in school have been subsumed as working children. Such a development is ill-advised. This article analyses this changing definition in the context of the Labour Commission Report 2001. With a redefinition of child labour, the number of working children is set at more than, 10 times the official figures available from Census and NSS reports. Such a development only aggravates the problem.*

**G K Lieten**

Starting an article on child labour with a reference to 'kichree' may sound odd. Yet there is a connection. Kichree is a composite product: it has rice, dal and possibly onions. While preparing the kichree, the cook has to be aware of the characteristics of the different ingredients and how they have to be treated differently. By first keeping them separate and giving them a different treatment, a wonderful end result can be obtained.

Child education, like kichree, is a composite product: the school draws different types of children and still leaves many children out. In order to develop education into universal education, these latter children will have to be added. Adding them necessitates a knowledge of the characteristics of these children and the reasons why they are not enrolled or why they have dropped out. Adding them to the school system, and producing universal education as the end product, thus requires a rigorous analytical framework lest one muddles different categories. Unless the 'ingredients' which enter (or do not enter) education are analysed and categorised separately, universal education will remain elusive.

In their drive for universal education, many activists and NGOs have muddled the different categories of out-of-school children into one: the category of child labour. All children not in school are subsumed as working children. I shall elaborate on this analysis and on the ill-advisability of doing so. Such an exercise is particularly warranted since the Labour Commission Report 2001 of the government of India has adopted an approach which earlier was limited to vociferous NGOs and to most foreign observers: with a redefinition of child labour, the number of working children is set at more than 100 million, 10 times more than the official figures which are available from census and NSS reports. The concept of 'child labour' has been redefined so as to

produce a figure that fits the strategy of certain organisations. It thereby, I shall argue, compounds the problem.

### **Labour Commission Report**

Child labour has cropped up as an issue of widespread concern in the last quarter of the 20th century. Many dramatic case studies have appeared to illustrate the heinous conditions under which children have to work. The report *Women and Child Labour* of the study group commissioned by the Labour Commission [Study Group 2001] marshals a number of such cases to illustrate many things:

- children are working unacceptably long hours a day;
- children are working in narrow trenches in mines where adults cannot crawl;
- children in the carpet industry and elsewhere have been bonded;
- children are severely punished and tortured if they attempt to escape;
- also in agriculture many children work as bonded agricultural labour, and at the age of ten a child is found to replace his father as bonded worker: in Sivakasi for example, ‘the child in the womb is pledged to the factory’, as one report has indicated;
- home-based industries with child labourers working under abominable conditions are quite typical in a number of industries;
- children working in unhygienic and crowded conditions suffer from many occupation-related diseases; they become old and unproductive citizens at a time when most other people are just beginning to participate in a full life.

One problem with all these statements is that the stories in the report of the Study Group have not been documented. The study group notices that the last two decades have seen “a proliferation of data and literature on the life and worlds of working children” [Study Group 2001:167]. It is therefore unfortunate that the restricted list of literature contains hardly any work of relevance to the subject. It mentions exactly six sources: an in-house magazine article of 1977, a Mainstream article of 1983, a report on bonded labour in 1981, an advocacy booklet of 1985, and two books written in the 1990s by one author (Weiner) who had given more opinions on child labour than hard facts and by one author (Burra) who in her concern to create awareness had failed to restrain her tendency to overstatement and generalisation.

No sources are given, and no time, place or background are provided for each case illustration. In fact, a critical mind could suggest that the stories may have been invented to illustrate a case rather than to deduct an argument from sufficiently marshalled facts or even anecdotic evidence. The following sentence is a neat illustration of the many unsubstantiated wild statements (not that they are necessarily incorrect):

Being beaten for breakages, for not being quick enough, being starved, are commonly mentioned as penalties imposed by the employers. Innumerable such instances are reported by many researchers and activists who have painstakingly interviewed

these child workers and also rescued them [Study Group 2001:174].

Bringing the many phenomena of exploitation, repression and neglect onto the public stage has been the job of academics, political activists and journalists. By bringing the injustice into the open, the first step towards redress is taken. Otherwise, as E P Thompson has noted [in *The Making of the English Working Class*, 1980:377]: "We forget how long abuses can continue 'unknown' until they are articulated: how people can look at misery and not notice it, until misery itself rebels."

Some good work has been done on documenting the injustice done to children and on the shifts in labour relations taking place in the different industries. Various interesting sources [particularly Anker and Barge 1998] could have been consulted. The V V Giri National Labour Institute has conducted a number of interesting studies. The latest [Ghosh, Raj and Sekar 2001] contains valuable information on the industries with a pervasive child labour problem: knitwear, brassware, locks, glass bangles, matches, slates, carpets, and gems. So does the compendium by Mishra (2000).

Thanks to the articulation of concern for child labour abuse, national and international attention has grown during the last decade of the 20th century. The lack of hard evidence in the Labour Report is therefore a missed chance to really document the sad story of child labour in India, and also to establish a more realistic picture than in some of the ongoing wild stories, painting India as a huge child labour camp.

These stories had been documented meticulously in the 19th century in Europe, in the midst of a moral outcry by some concerned citizens against the exploitation of child labour, under conditions and to an extent that were at least as detrimental to the poor as the situation is today in India. The well-documented reports and studies helped social activists, unions and politicians to make child labour into a central public concern.

The issue of public investigation had come up in India in the 1980s, and at that time the government had taken a praiseworthy initiative, which the Labour Commission could have followed. It commissioned studies to document the plight of the children working in various industries in Sivakasi, Jaipur, Surat, Jaipur, Markapur, Mirzapur-Bhadohi, etc. Lakshmidhar Mishra (2000), the ex-secretary in the department of labour, government of India, draws heavily on these studies. Most of the case studies in Ghosh, Raj and Sekar (2001) have studies in the same industries after an interval of one decade and a half.

One had hoped that the Labour Commission had commissioned research so as to really present the situation on the ground rather than to repeat some of the tear-jerking stories, without providing any evidence or source. Millions of young lives are being maltreated, misused and throttled. That reality is in urgent need of research evidence.

An exercise on the aggregate presence of child labour will be blurred by inaccuracy of concepts, but some measure of delineation could be attempted. The Study Group report rejects the difference that is often being made between child labour and child work. The basis on which this rejection is done is interesting. The report first refers to a definition of child labour as work done "outside their home/family for a minimal wage ... and the conditions in which they work are detrimental to their well-being and safety". It then infers that according to this definition child labour is synonymous only with exploitation of young children working outside their homes by their usurious employers: 'this definition does not consider work done by children within their home/family as being exploitative and therefore, child labour' [Study Group 2001: 167-68].

The authors of the report thus suggest that in the common definition, child labour is associated only with 'employment' and a high degree of exploitation by commercial enterprises. The authors are not correct in referring to the child labour definition in this way. Such a definition has hardly been used by anybody and is thus an easy target to sabre and replace it by something else. If the commonly accepted definition had been used, it would have been more difficult to sabre it.

The government of India bases its statistics of child labour on the definitions used in the Census and Sample Surveys. Work, in the instruction manuals to the census enumerators, is to be understood as 'participation in any economically productive activity' [Census of India 1981, Volume 22, Part IV-A:13]. Such a definition, unlike what the Study Group seems to assume, includes children working inside the household and children working in self-employment.

It is true that many activities, which children and women undertake and which are necessary inputs in the (economic) management of the household, will not be included under the heading 'work'. The census data thus may suffer from an undercount. Children looking after cattle or collecting firewood may often do this for household consumption, but this work may also lead, directly or indirectly, to production for sale. The census organisation has been aware of a possible ambivalence that could have led to arbitrary entries by the enumerators. It has therefore clearly instructed enumerators not to include a specific type of work: "a man or a woman who is doing household duties may be producing or making something only for the domestic consumption of the household and not for sale. Such a person is not a worker, even though from his or her point of view the activity is productive" [Census of India 1981, Volume 22, Part IV-A: 17]. This restriction would obviously apply also, and in its significance even more so, to the work contributed by children.

Standard household work is thus excluded from the definition of labour. It is considered as work and not as labour. Put differently: it is 'kam' and not 'shram', 'mazduri', 'rozgar' or 'mehnat'. Kam need not interfere with a sound development of the boy or the girl. As long as the time spent on household and farm work is not too taxing and time-constrained, the child may even stand to benefit.

The concept of child labour, in my opinion, should be restricted to the sphere of production and services that interfere with the normative development of children. A useful definition is the one introduced by Stein and Davies (1940: 112-13) and referred to occasionally: “any work by children that interferes with their full-physical development, the opportunities for a desirable minimum of education and of their needed recreation”.

Quite a lot of what has been subsumed under child labour, even under the census definition, and as such has entered the statistics, is work performed during a standard process of socialisation. Such activities are not per definition associated with labour exploitation or interfering with the development of the child in the given circumstances. It is helpful to refer to the caveat introduced by Alec Fyfe (1989:3-4) who on all accounts has a long history of involvement in the struggle against child labour, first at ILO and then at UNICEF:

There is little doubt that many children welcome the opportunity to work, seeing in it the rite de passage to adulthood. Work can be a gradual initiation into adulthood and a positive element in the child's development. Light work, properly structured and phased, is not child labour. Work which does not detract from the other essential activities of children, namely, leisure, play and education, is not child labour. Child labour is work which impairs the health and development of children.

Child work could have a positive contribution to the development of the child. It would be advisable therefore to delineate where work transgresses into labour and where ‘acceptable levels’ of labour (at specific ages) crosses the limits. One needs to be careful to narrow the limits. A single estimate of child labour usually includes all work performed by children: children who do hazardous work as well as children who do non-hazardous work; children who work full-time throughout the year as well as children who work part-time or only during school vacations; children who are wage earners as well as children who are unpaid family workers; children who are attending school as well as children who are not attending school. For policy purposes, it would have been advisable to follow a stage approach and to demarcate the ‘worst forms’ of child labour (or exploitative labour hiring in general) from the work that many children may be doing in and around the household, assisting parents and relatives.

‘Advocacy statistics’ (overestimates of child labour), Richard Anker (1999) of the ILO has warned, purposely dramatise the magnitude of child labour and can have an unexpected negative effect of making “can make the problem appear too big to solve”. He has further suggested that the all-encompassing estimate of child labour is misleading since different types of child labour are combined into one number – resulting in the proverbial mixing of ‘apples and oranges’. Along the same lines, in the introductory statement, we have referred to the making of kichree.

## **An Overview**

The Study Group is weary of segregating types of labour (and work). It includes all work done by children, and states that it has to do so by necessity since, according to the argument, more and more paid work is shifted to home-based work and the distinction between work in the home and work outside has become blurred: "all forms of work are bad for children, and any form of distinction between one form of work or another done by children is completely arbitrary".

The distinction between exploitative and non-exploitative work, and, one assumes between highly intolerable forms and other work, is rejected since in the view of the Study Group work inside the home can be as exploitative as outside the home. This assumption is valid in a (limited) number of cases. Most of the children, even if they are classified in the official statistics as 'working' will not be sitting in sheds working from daybreak onwards at carpets, bidis or toys. Most of them will be working on the farm, attending cows or collecting fodder.

Let us look at the official figures. In India, with close to 30 per cent of the population urbanised, urban child labour accounts for only 5.5 per cent of the entire child labour in the country. The sectoral distribution of child labour in the countryside indicates that most of the children are engaged in agriculture, rather than in industrial sectors, which have become the focus of media attention and trade sanction initiatives. According to the census data of 1991, around 42 per cent of the child workers were engaged on their family farm in agriculture and in animal husbandry and fishing respectively. The NSS data on the 50th Round in 1993-94, has provided similar figures. Many of these activities are relatively light in nature and, most of the time, have limited working hours. The activities, apart from transplanting, weeding and crop collection, include grazing and bathing of cattle, catching fish, collection of grass and fruits, collection and carrying of firewood, etc.

In 1991, 46 per cent of the rural child workers were engaged as agricultural labourer. Around 2.4 per cent of the officially registered working child population was engaged in household industry, usually a manufacturing unit conducted by a family member, and a further 4.7 per cent worked in other manufacturing units. Construction (0.7 per cent) and mining (0.22 per cent) were the other sectors where, more than in agriculture, the physical and mental well-being of the child may be at risk. In absolute figures, we are referring to a total labour force of around 1.5 million in the non-agricultural sector. It would have been useful if the Study Group had looked at this group separately and had formulated specific policy measures. It would also have been useful if the Study Group had looked at regional patterns and on that basis had tried to answer the vexed question as to why child labour occurs. It also would have been useful if the Study Group had substantiated its claim that "more and more paid work is shifted to home-based work" (and thereby suggesting that all these children sitting at home are producing for the market). The data of both the NSS and the census data do rebuff such an inference. The percentage of working children has come down quite significantly, and particularly the categories 'self-employed children' and 'helper in household enterprise' has come down drastically.

From the official statistics, a reasonable idea of the magnitude of child labour in India can be deduced. At the state level in 1991, according to the census data, the level of child labour varied from 0.6 per cent in Kerala to 12.5 per cent in Andhra Pradesh. The magnitude was relatively high (above 8 per cent) in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. The country average was 6.4 per cent, down from 9.2 per cent in 1961. The NSS data allow us to separate the cohort 5 to 9 and the cohort 10 to 14. This provides a more interesting overview since, with dramatic exceptions, the very young children usually do not join the labour process (and many in the countryside may join school anyway only at the age of 8). In the mid-1970s, 1.1 per cent of the children below 10 were working. In the age category of children between 10 and 14, however, the incidence of child labour in some states is high.

Table 1 has the data on the major states. At the lower end, we find Kerala, Haryana and Punjab, but also Uttar Pradesh and Bihar appear to have a reasonably low incidence of child labour. On the other hand, Andhra Pradesh (25 per cent), Rajasthan (17 per cent), Karnataka (15 per cent) and Gujarat (11.5 per cent) had a dismal record.

**Table: Incidence of Child Labour Across Indian States**

States	NSS (1999-2000; Principal and Subsidiary Occupations)			Census 1991
	5 to 9 (rural)	10 to 14 (rural)	10 to 14 (urban)	
Andhra Pradesh	2.7	25.1	0.7	12.5
Assam	0.4	4.6	0.8	5.7
Bihar	0.2	5	0.3	4.3
Gujarat	0.7	11.6	0.4	7.1
Haryana	0.1	2.6	0.2	3
Himachal Pradesh	0.6	8.1	0.2	4.8
Karnataka	1.1	15.2	0.6	11.1
Kerala	0	0.7	0	0.6
Madhya Pradesh	0.3	10.6	0.3	9.9
Maharashtra	0.8	8.5	0.2	8.1
Orissa	0.4	9	0.2	8.5
Punjab	0.5	5.5	0.4	3.6
Rajasthan	2.5	16.7	0.5	7.8
Tamil Nadu	0.4	8.6	0.5	5.9
Uttar Pradesh	0.2	6.4	0.6	4.2
West Bengal	0.4	8.8	0.6	4.8
India	0.7	9.3	0.4	6.4

Source: National Sample Survey Report No 458 (Employment and Unemployment Situation in India, 1999-2000), and Population Census as reported in Thorat and Sadana (2001).

In the 1990s, a little less than half the child labour in rural India was concentrated in four states: Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. On the basis of the 'poverty argument' and the 'good policy' impression, these figures come a bit as a surprise. One would have expected Bihar,

Uttar Pradesh and Assam to figure in the list, rather than Karnataka, Andhra and Maharashtra.

Various authors [e.g., in Kannan 2001 and in Ramachandran and Massün 2002] have attempted to look for correlations: income poverty, land poverty, female education, fertility rate, agricultural productivity, etc. The profit motive and the 'nimble finger' factor argument have also been singled out. Poverty, related to high unemployment, does not appear to be directly correlated with child labour. It is significant to note that the states with the highest child labour incidence are also some of the states with a high per capita state domestic product (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu).

We therefore wish to formulate the causal connection differently: child labour associates with reasonably extended labour opportunities and with a segmentation of the labour market. Under conditions of an excess supply of labour (and thus low demand for labour), one actually could expect employers to employ adults rather than children. In an environment of a weak or non-existent collective bargaining power and of an abundant supply of (adult) labour, employers would ultimately lower adult wages to a level hardly above the level of child wages, and opt for adult workers. In a way this does happen; and in a way, this does not happen. Child labour appears to be higher in areas with more demand for labour. In those areas, female and male work participation is high. The adults usually have some form of alternative employment, either on a small piece of land or in a different segment of the labour market. The growth of labour market segmentation creates a set of submarkets with different employment conditions and different labour profiles. Such markets are served by members of poor families: some sectors draw on the child labour force, leaving the adults to work on a small plot of land or in a separate job.

The segmentation of the labour market usually occurs in an environment in which there is a reasonably high demand for labour and a low degree of labour empowerment. Under such circumstances, unhindered by countervailing power, employers have created selective markets for (child) labour in addition to a labour market for (male and female) adults. Child labour actually correlates with high levels of employment and gets drawn into one segment of the labour market [see Lieten 2002 for a further extension of this argument].

Analysis shows illustrates that the state domestic product (one measure of poverty) is only weakly related to the incidence of child labour. There is a strong correlation with overall work participation. The correlation is also (almost) equally strong with the female work participation rate. The states (Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Himachal Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu) with a higher labour incidence have a much higher (female) work participation rate than for example Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

An explanation for the continuation of child labour may be found in different ways. A debate on the modes of explanations has been going on, and the above explanation is only one angle from which to approach the problem. It is, however, clear that clarity

on one or more causal connections will be useful in developing policy measures. Such causal connections will become ephemeral if child labour is losing its concise meaning and if it stands for a composite meaning.

### **Out-of-School Children**

In the Labour Commission Report, all 'working children' are taken as one hardly differentiated category. The Study Group does not stop here. It uses an even more comprehensive definition of child labour. It namely, also includes all the children who are out-of-school. The concept of 'nowhere children' has been introduced by DP Chaudhri. It is a measure of all the children who are not registered as 'workers' and who are not attending school either. They are somewhere outside these two categories of childhood. They are 'nowhere' in statistical terms.

In the opinion of the Study Group (2001: 169) such a child "is inevitably drawn into supplementing family labour". The consideration for taking such a position is laudable:

This definition of child labour which equates all children not going to school with child labourers emanates from the rights – based approach towards development which considers being – out-of school as a denial of child's rights to education.

The evidence for such a clubbing of 100 million nowhere children under 'labour', however, is meagre. The nowhere children are stated to be 'potential' child labourers and are assumed to be staying home from school so that they can take over some of the household duties of the parents and allow the latter to go out and work. The automatic assumption that children-out-of-school are children-in-work, however, is only warranted when it can be shown that the non-attendance is because of the work they necessarily have to perform. If for other reasons children are not going to school, which is the case especially with girls from the time of early puberty onwards and often with poor children before the age of 8, it may logically be expected that they do contribute some work in the household or in the field. This 'some work', however, would not amount to 'child labour'.

These children are deprived children, no doubt, but it is unwarranted to classify this spending of childhood time as 'child labour'. If given a chance, if work were available, a number of them could possibly turn into child labourers. As yet, they are not child labourers, and one does not have to look for causes as to why they are 'workers' (and what can be done about it), but at reasons why they are not in school (and what can be done about it).

The report in a way recognises the crucial distinction. It proposes solutions for 2 categories of working children (children out of school working directly for an employer and children working at home, indirectly for an employer) and solutions for children just out of school. The solutions indeed are of an entirely different nature. Whereas for the first two categories of children (banning of the first category and the payment of minimum wages – or

product prices, I assume – to the parents of the second category so that children of this second category do not have to supplement incomes), the other out-of-school children are to be enticed to go to school by providing them with mid-day meals and free textbooks.

What is the logic of including all 75-100 million nowhere children under the category child labour (i.e., also 13 and 14 years' old children in the working child category) if the argument is that the child should not be deprived of 'elementary education'? In other words, if a 13-year-old child has studied up to class 7 or 8, and when it stays home (doing odd jobs in the households or on the farm, or loitering around), is she or he a labourer in the same way in which a 9-year-old girl would be?

What is the role of these 'nowhere' children in the functioning or dysfunctioning of the economy anyway? If all nowhere children (and all the non-economic work and even non-work they do) are included in the category of working children, one wonders how the Study Group (2001: 182) can conclude that child labour 'causes the wages to fall' and is 'both a cause and an effect of non-payment of minimum wages'. One wonders how it can conclude that 'prohibition' rather than regulation is the only answer. Such conclusions can only apply to what in a more rigorous definition is meant by 'child labour' and not to the entire category of deprived children.

How can the millions of deprived children who are roaming around in their hamlet and neighbourhood, rather than going to school, cause the wages to fall? How could a child be prohibited, and why should it, from helping in the household, on the field, in the stables and even in light forms of household industry? Child labour in the more precise sense, rather than in the sense of nowhere children, may cause wages to fall. Prohibition, and a direct pro-active intervention is required when 'child labour' is involved.

A distinction is to be made between labour, which is detrimental to the development of the child, and work, which may help the child to develop skills, responsibilities and concerns. The Study Group actually has tackled this distinction (on page 183) but it has not formulated one opinion on this hotly debated issue. This is possibly an indication of a sharp division between some (child-centred NGO-related members on the team) and others.

My objection to the all-in definition of child labour is actually in line with what the report itself states, at a later stage, when it deals with 'Recommendations'. The new definition of labour which it proposes in that section is a definition of worker which takes into account the entire range of work, which contributes to the economy. That definition, oddly enough, is in line with the common definitions used in India, but is at variance with the definition used in most sections of the report:

A worker under labour law should be any person who contributes to the Gross National Product by his or her work. It includes work for market economy and for self or home consumption. For purposes of labour law, the workers who are excluded from the

definition are: those workers only engaged in cooking and cleaning and child-care in the family [Study Group 2001: 205].

If we apply this definition to children, we have a solid basis to work on, within the norms and regulations of labour relations, and sincerely apply the government machinery and the activists of civil society to apply the rules of the land. That basis, it is true, would not suffice to cover all the deprived children. The laudable aim of covering all the deprived children (including the 'potential' child labour), however, is not brought closer to fulfilment by 'redefining' labour when it comes to 'child labour', i.e., 'all work done by children' and extending it to all the potential work done by nowhere children.

### **Developmental Intervention**

The causal factors behind child labour and behind non-enrolment of school drop-out are different and should be analytically separated. Yet, the approach suggested in the report has a certain validity. If indeed nowhere children are prone to become child labourers (this possibility applies to children in school as well), a child labour law could include measures to prevent this from happening. A child labour law, it is proposed, should both be protective and regulatory as well as developmental. The onus for implementing such a policy should be jointly that of various ministries, including the ministry of education. In that sense, the elimination of child labour and the assertion of universal education are inseparable.

Most of the text on child labour is devoted to solutions. The target is unexceptionable: to deny schooling to any child is unacceptable:

A child-centred approach to child labour is therefore not only to save the child from severe exploitation, but also to ensure that she or he has the chance to a future [Study Group 2001: 178].

The elimination of child labour and the universalisation of elementary education are regarded as 'inseparable processes', and the entire strategy should be based on 'the norm that no child should work and all children should be in schools'. This is an important contribution to the debate. The Study Group has adopted a child-centred approach and such an approach can only be holistic: universal education and the assault on 'child labour' go hand in hand. There is a small detail, however. Universalisation of education does not supersede socialisation. It supplements socialisation. One aspect of socialisation is that children learn to 'work' (although that may not be the case with children in elite families with ample servants at their disposal). While doing odd jobs in the household (fetching water, washing up, looking after brothers and sisters, etc) and on the farm (tending cattle, weeding, etc) children are preparing themselves for adulthood and are learning to take responsibilities.

By earlier defending child labour and child work as one concept, one now wonders whether the authors indeed do suggest that children should not work at all. That would, in my humble opinion,

be an erroneous approach, having worked myself on my grandfather's farm and assisting my father during holidays as a house painter. Staying for a moment at the personal level, in order to make the point in a different way: my own children have been asked, and usually they have complied, to take their share in the household work. I rest convinced that it has contributed positively to the development of their personality. Is it possible that the stark divide that exists in India between the workers and the non-workers (the 'babu', the 'badhralok', the old rich and the nouveau rich) has instilled a disdain for (manual) work, and is this possibly the reason why the Study Group states that the norm should be 'that no child should work'?

Myron Weiner (1991) who, I agree, can be criticised on many counts, has developed the idea that many upper class Indians wish to demarcate themselves from those who are destined to work. At the core of the Indian social order, he argued, are notions concerning the respective role of upper and lower social strata, the former getting education and good white-collar jobs, and the latter being prepared for a long life of labour, service and servitude:

A distinction is made between children as 'hands' and children as 'minds'; that is, between the child who must be taught to 'work' and the child who must be taught to 'learn', the acquisition of manual skills as distinctive from cognitive skills [Weiner 1991: 188].

It is possible that the disdain for all 'work' is a reaction to this hierarchical state of mind and an intention to close the bridge between the 'hands' and the 'minds'.

### **Conclusion**

Analytical clarity is not merely an academic exercise. It is closely related to the pattern of solutions to any specific problem. Child labour is an aberration that is to be eliminated forthwith. Scrambling all forms of deprived childhood into one category of 'child labour' is compounding confusion and disagreement rather than being helpful.

A distinction should be made between (a) child-friendly forms of socialisation, including light work, (b) child labour at specific ages and up to specific degrees of strain but not interfering with school, (c) non-enrolment in school, even if not labouring, (d) child labour interfering with school, and (e) the worst and intolerable forms of child exploitation, even amounting to child-bondedness.

The explanations for and the reasons why circumstances (a) to (e) occur are different. Treating them differently will allow us to devise proper strategies to deal with the specific problems.

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